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HEG77-73 Wall Finishes

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Wall Finishes

This NebGuide discusses interior wall treatments: paint, wallpaper and fabric.

By Magdalene Pfister Extension Specialist (Home Furnishings)

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Paint

Paint is an easy, quick and inexpensive way to get the color you want. If you have a particular color in mind, you are most likely to find it in paint or have it mixed for the desired shade.

The solid effect of painted walls looks well in contemporary homes. In an old house you'll find that paint helps hide radiators and outdated woodwork. Think twice before painting over wallpaper if you will ever want to remove the paper.



As you shop for paint remember that the color chips and charts are small and the colors will look brighter and darker on your walls. Try larger samples at the window wall, where there is least light, and also on the opposite wall. Look at them in the daytime and at night. It may be well for you to buy paint lighter than you want.

Interior paints vary from high gloss to flat or dull finish. The choice depends on use.

In general, the glossier the paint the more washable it will be. It is especially suited for kitchen and for work and play areas.

There are many finishes from which to select for walls, ceiling and woodwork. Each type requires its own preparation of surface and application. These questions may help you decide. Will it create the effect or mood I want? Will it wear well? How much does it cost (including labor if you don't do the work yourself)? Is it easy to maintain?

Paint and paper are the most widely used wall finishes. Other finishes include tiles, fabric, cork, carpet,

paneling and linoleums.

Paints are of two general types: water soluble and oil base.

The water-soluble paints, also called latex, acrylic or polyvinyl paints, are easy to apply, fast drying and have little odor and fumes. They touch up easily, will not darken with age, and are simple to clean up. The disadvantages are that one coat may not cover and it may have a dull lifeless look.

Oil base paints, called alkyd paints, are durable and scrubbable. They have a higher pigment concentration and therefore have good one-coat hiding power. They produce a richer, smoother kind of finish but are more difficult to apply. There is a slight odor and the color may darken in time.

Enamels are made with a varnish or resin base and thus are not true paints. They require an undercoat unless the surface has previously been finished. Enamels are especially tough and washable. It is possible to buy a latex enamel in a flat finish.

"Dripless" paint is a fairly recent development. It has a jellylike consistency in the can, but spreads easily with either a brush or roller.

Wallpaper

Wallpaper and other flexible coverings offer a wide variety of color, patterns and textures. It is possible to find a paper to go with any style of furnishings, formal or informal, in a wide price range. Some patterns are coordinated with fabric.

Wallpapers can be classified into three types. The nonwashable or water sensitive, must be cleaned with commercial type cleaner. The water-resistant type of finish may usually be cleaned 1 to 3 times with mild soap or detergent. The scrubbable ones are truly washable.

Many changes have been made in paper, finishes and printing. The addition of plastic resins produces strong paper. Some are treated to resist bacteria and mildew. Trimmed, pre-pasted papers are available. Strippable paper can be pulled carefully from the wall and reused, providing that an oil base primer is used on the wall.

Vinyl wall coverings are a more recent development. There are several types ranging from vinyl-coated paper to vinyl-impregnated with a man-made base. These are durable and easy to maintain but more expensive than paper. Vinyl is also available in hard surface tiles and rigid panels.

Always be sure to get samples large enough to give you an idea how it will look on the walls. When possible, take two rolls home so you can see how the pattern looks.

Wallpapers are priced by the roll and a single roll usually covers 30 to 35 square feet. A double roll covers twice the amount.

Fabric

There are fabrics made especially for wall coverings which come with a paper backing. Grass cloth is an example. Many kinds of firm, closely woven fabric can be used. Some possibilities are sheeting, burlap, canvas, ticking and chintz. Brocades and damask provide richness and elegance. Felt is a good choice. It comes in a wide range of colors, and often is treated to be soil and flame resistant. Felt, carpet and other fabrics can improve the acoustics in a room.

There are several ways fabrics can be placed on the wall. They may be pasted, held in place with double faced

tape, "upholstered" to the wall with a tacking strip, or stapled or tacked to wooden strips.

FLEXIBLE MATERIALS			
Material	Character	Advantage	Disadvantage
Carpet Cost: moderate	Varied from informal shag to firm, smooth background to elegant plush	Sound absorbent. Easy maintenance. Doesn't show nail holes used for hanging wall accessories.	Four walls may look like a padded cell.
Cork Cost: moderately high	Sympathetic natural color and texture.	Durable, easily kept; sound absorbent; good insulator.	Harmed by moisture. Stains unless sealed.
Fabric Cost: wide price range	Variety ranging from informal burlap and ticking to elegant formal damask.	Coordinates wall with other furnishings such as window treatment.	Monotonous repetition of pattern.
Felt Cost: moderate	Smooth, soft. Mat surface.	Some noise reduction. Doesn't show pin marks.	None of any importance.
Grass Cloth Cost: high	Hand-made natural material with variation in shade.	Natural beauty of real grass woven by hand or machine.	Fades from atmospheric gasses. Some may not like the variations in shade.
Linoleum Cost: moderate	Smooth, mat surface; great variety of colors and patterns.	Durable easily maintained; reduces noise somewhat.	None unless you don't like its character.
Wallpaper Cost: wide range	Tremendous variety of color and pattern.	Can give decided character some kinds very durable and easy to keep.	When poorly chosen can ruin a room.
Vinyl Cost: moderate to high	Many patterns; pleasing textures; mat or glossy surfaces.	Very durable; resists moisture, dirt, stains. Cleans with damp cloth.	None of any importance.

File HEG73 under HOME FURNISHING

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